

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 410
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY CAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 615

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PEPR, IS, EG, XF
SUBJ: WEST BANK VIEWS - HIKMAT AL-MASRI

SUMMARY: NABLUS NOTABLE HIKMAT AL-MASRI IS IN OPTIMISTIC
FRAME OF MIND IN CONTRAST TO PESSIMISM OF AVERAGE WEST BANKER.
AL-MASRI BELIEVES IT IS IMPORTANT TO ACHIEVE AGREEMENT ON
DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES AFTER WHICH HUSSEIN AND PALESTINIANS
WILL JOIN NEGOTIATIONS. HE IS CONCERNED OVER SADAT'S ATTACKS
ON THE PLO WHICH, HE FEELS, IS AS MUCH A VICTIM OF THE LARNACA
EPISODE AS IS EGYPT. END SUMMARY.

1. I CALLED ON HIMAT AL-MASRI IN NABLUS MARCH 2. HE HAD JUST
RETURNED FROM AMMAN AND WAS IN GOOD HEALTH AND SPIRITS.

2. HIS COUSIN AND FORMER MAYOR HAJ MAZZOUZ AL-MASRI WAS JUST
LEAVING AS I ENTERED. HAJ MAZZOUZ HECTORED ME AT LENGTH ABOUT
ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS, WHICH WERE GROWING DAILY, AND FACT
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US "DID NOTHING." I REPLIED US OPPOSITION TO SETTLEMENTS
CLEAR CUT, GOI UNHAPPY WITH OUR POSITION AND, WITHOUT GOING
INTO DETAILS, ASSERTED STRONG US VIEWS ON THIS ISSUE HAVING
BENEFICIAL EFFECT. HIKMAT NODDED ASSENT. HAJ MAZZOUZ GRUMPED
AND LEFT.

3. AL-MASRI NOTED SADAT HAD ARRIVED IN WASHINGTON DISCOURAGED.

WHEN HE LEFT HE SEEMED IN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FRAME OF MIND. WHAT, HE WONDERED, HAD CAUSED THE CHANGE? I REPLIED THAT PERHAPS IT WAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASCERTAIN FOR HIMSELF FIRST HAND THE STEADFASTNESS OF US POLICY AND THE PRESIDENT'S DETERMINATION TO KEEP WORKING FOR A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT DESPITE UPS AND DOWNS IN NEGOTIATING PROCESS. AVERAGE WEST BANKER, AL-MASRI SAID, WAS VERY DISCOURAGED. FALLOUT FROM LARNACA INCIDENT HAD KINDLED, FEARS SADAT PREPARING GROUND FOR BILATERAL AGREEMENT ON SINAI. "YOU AND I," HE SAID, "KNOW THIS ISN'T SO."

4. MAIN EFFORT SHOULD BE TO ACHIEVE AGREEMENT ON DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES WHICH WOULD BE CLEAR ON WITHDRAWAL. AFTER THIS, KING HUSSEIN WOULD JOIN NEGOTIATIONS AS WOULD PALESTINIANS. IF ISSUE PLO PARTICIPATION PROVED TO BE DIFFICULT, HE WAS CERTAIN PLO WOULD NOT ALLOW ITSELF BECOME AN OBSTACLE. WHEN THIS POINT REACHED, HIKMAT THOUGHT IT WOULD BE DESIRABLE TO SHIFT NEGOTIATIONS TO GENEVA IN ORDER TO DRAW SOVIETS AND SYRIA INTO PICTURE (HE SEEMED MORE CONCERNED OVER SOVIET EXCLUSION THAN SYRIA SINCE MOSCOW HAD CAPABILITY OF PLAYING SPOILER ROLE THROUGH OTHER ARAB STATES).

5. AL-MASRI SEEMED QUITE CONTENT TO HAVE INTERIM REGIME PROVIDED GOI ACCEPTED PRINCIPLE OF WITHDRAWAL AND THAT PALESTINIANS COULD DECIDE THEIR FUTURE IN A PLEBISCITE BY A FIXED DATE.
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6. COMMENTING ON EGYPT'S CURRENT POSITION VIS A VIS THE PALESTINIANS, HIKMAT AL-MASRI SORROWFULLY OBSERVED THAT SADAT AT LARNACA HAD LOST HIS NERVE. HIGHJACKING HAD BEEN ENGINEERED BY IRAQ AND WAS AIMED AS MUCH AT FATAH AND ARAFAT AS IT WAS AT SADAT. HE THOUGHT SADAT SHOULD BLAME INDIVIDUAL CULPRITS AND THEIR REAL MASTERS RATHER THAN PALESTINIANS IN GENERAL.

7. HIKMAT HAD JUST RETURNED FROM AMMAN WHERE HE HAD BEEN CONSULTING ARABIAN PENINSULA AMBASSADORS ON HIS FORTHCOMING TRIP TO RAISE FUNDS FOR AL-NAJAH UNIVERSITY. HE EXPECTED TO START IN SAUDIA ARABIA AND THEN TOUR GULF STATES.

8. COMMENT: HIKMAT AL-MASRI IS THE DEAN OF WEST BANK NOTABLES. HE SEEMED BOTH PATIENT AND OPTIMISTIC. FOR THE FIRST TIME HE DID NOT COMPLAIN ABOUT US POLICY. I HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT HE HAD NOT TALKED TO SENIOR HKJ OFFICIALS ABOUT WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO GET HUSSEIN INTO THE NEGOTIATIONS AND THAT HIS COMMENTS ON THIS SCORE WERE LARGELY HIS PERSONAL OPINION. THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THIS CONVERSATION WAS CONFIRMATION, ALBEIT OBLIQUE, THAT PALESTINIANS WOULD BE WILLING TO JOIN NEGOTIATIONS IN EVENT HUSSEIN WERE TO DO SO AND PLO DID NOT

OBJECT TOO STRENOUSLY. HE ALSO BELIEVES HIS FRIEND SADAT IS
MAKING A MISTAKE IN ATTACKING "THE PALESTINIANS" FOR THE LARNACA
FIASCO RATHER THAN CONCENTRATING ON THE REAL INSTIGATORS.

9. POLOFF HULL'S CONVERSATION WITH ACTING MAYOR ZAFER AL-MASRI
REPORTED SEPTEL.
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